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North American Edition

Fifty Years ^{LIBRARY} in
Southern Asia



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MISSIONARY SOCIETY
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
150 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

Fifty Years In Southern Asia

By Bishop J. M. Thoburn, D.D.

Fifty years ago our Church had not yet fairly entered upon her foreign missionary work. Up to that date our people had been absorbed in the immense and urgent demands of the home work, especially in the great West, but previous to the beginning of the last century only a slight beginning had been made among the teeming millions of the heathen world. Shortly after the General Conference of 1852 Dr. Durbin became impressed with a conviction that the time had come for the Methodist Episcopal Church to enter the foreign mission field in force, and he began to express his views clearly and forcibly in official circles, and to some extent throughout the Church at large. The members of the Missionary Board were quite prepared to adopt his views, and after careful inquiry and due deliberation it was decided to found a well equipped and strong mission in India, as the first step toward a widespread and vigorous work in different parts of the heathen world. India was selected

chiefly for the reason that it was the only large region in the world which was at that time both wide open, and accessible to the Christian missionary.

CHOICE OF A FOUNDER

After a long, and at times discouraging search, the choice of a founder and superintendent for the new work fell upon Dr. William Butler of the New England Conference. Every one has heard the story of his appointment in 1856, of his prompt departure, of his arrival in India and selection of a field in the northern part of the country, of the energetic beginning of his work, of the outburst of the great war of the Mutiny, of the breaking up of the new mission, of its reorganization, and of the new start made in 1859.

EMBARRASSED BY SUCCESS

The progress of this mission has been rapid, and in some respects extraordinary. It so far surpassed the expectations of those who sent Dr. Butler into the field, that they soon found themselves embarrassed by its success. It had been Dr. Durbin's plan to establish a vigorous mission with twenty-five men, a force which according to the scale of that day would have seemed exceptionally strong, and it was hoped that the success of this force would stimulate the Church to make other missionary attempts in different parts of the world. The territory selected for these twenty-five missionaries was about the size of

the State of Indiana, and contained a population of nearly seventeen million people. It was a most interesting and inviting field, and certainly seemed large enough to absorb the sympathy and challenge the energy of the Church for many years, but God had other plans in reserve for the missionaries, and as time passed they were led into fields of which they had never dreamed, and into kinds of work which they had never sought, and did not desire. Step by step they were led outward and onward until not only the whole great empire of India was embraced in their field, but they passed onward toward the southeast and entered Malaysia, where they gained a strong position and were ready, when in the strange providence of God the Philippines were brought under the American flag, to enter in and proclaim a free gospel to the millions who had so unexpectedly become their fellow subjects.

FROM A MUSTARD SEED TO A GREAT TREE

But while the missionaries were thus pushing on from one post to another, the original field was by no means neglected. From the very first steady progress was reported. In 1858 Dr. Butler reported twenty-three members and probationers. In 1864, when Bishop Thompson went to India to reorganize the little mission into an Annual Conference, the membership was still small, being only 111 members and fif-

ty-three probationers, but in that distant day of small things these numbers appeared large, and were considered encouraging. A few years later the missionaries were drawn beyond the field first selected for them, and before the General Conference of 1876 met, they were preaching in all the great cities of the empire, and in nine different languages. A second Conference was organized at that time, but the work continued to spread, until at the present time the little Mission Conference of 1864 has expanded into nine Annual Conferences with 231 missionaries, 104 missionaries of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, 277 native members of Conference, 979 teachers, more than 125,000 church members and probationers, over 141,000 Sunday-school scholars, fifty-five high schools, four colleges, and a total Christian community of more than 185,000 souls!

HALF A CONTINENT AND A BABEL OF TONGUES

When this great work was started fifty years ago, it was the expectation of the missionary authorities at home, as well as of the missionaries in the field, that the work should be confined to one field of limited extent, in which only one language was spoken; but so far from being able to adhere to this purpose, our missionaries in Southern Asia today are preaching in thirty-seven

different tongues! So far from having a small field about the size of Indiana, and with a population of seventeen millions, they are scattered over the southern half of a continent, and are preaching to a teeming multitude of three hundred and fifty millions! Truly God has put his seal upon the work of his servants, and the great Church which planted and sustains this work should ponder well the lesson which God has been teaching her in the ends of the earth.

FOR THE FATHERLESS IN THEIR AFFLICTION

But the above statistics do not by any means tell the full story of the success and wide influence of this work in Southern Asia. It was in India that our Church first entered boldly and on a large scale upon orphanage work. In 1860 two orphanages were opened, one for boys and one for girls, and from that day to the present hour no orphan has been turned away. More than twenty orphanages and several thousand children are cared for,—more perhaps than in all the other sections of our Church put together.

THE HEALING ART IN WOMAN'S HANDS

It was to this Mission that the first woman physician who ever entered a heathen land was sent, and in which an attempt was ever made to teach Asiatic women the science and practice of med-

icine. It was within the bounds of the original Mission that the first college for women was established, and today this institution holds a leading position in the empire. No less than seven publishing houses have been established at different language centers in this vast field, from which literature in twenty or more languages is issued. Training schools have been established at many points, and hundreds of young men are receiving instruction to fit them for the ministry of the Word among the multitudes of simple people who wait for the light which can best be taken to them by representatives of their own people.

THE FULFILLMENT OF A GREAT HOPE

These facts are very striking and full of encouragement, apart from all other considerations, but the most striking feature of the case is the fulfillment of Dr. Durbin's hope that the mission in India might mark the beginning of a new era in the foreign work of our Church. This has been realized in an extraordinary way. Closely following the advance in India, a new era opened in Eastern Asia. The little mission in China has expanded into five great fields. Japan was occupied, and then Korea; Mexico was taken up, and the little mission at Buenos Ayres has been extended over the whole of South America; and, lastly, the work in Africa has

received a special recognition from the General Conference, which will make it in time one of the grandest mission fields in the world.

AN APPROPRIATE CALL AND A FITTING CELEBRATION

In view of all these facts, there seems to be a special propriety in the action of the General Conference in calling on the Church to celebrate in a fitting manner the conclusion of the first fifty years of the Mission in India. It concerns the missionary interests of the whole Church, and in a sense pertains to all our foreign work. The whole Church should join in thanksgiving, and should lay upon her altars an offering worthy of such an occasion.

A DESIGNATED DAY OF JUBILEE

After long and careful inquiry, the *second Sunday in May* has been selected as the date on which our people are invited to hold special missionary services in all their sanctuaries in celebration of this important event in our history. The day should be made one of joy and gladness, and a special thank-offering should be laid upon the altar of every sanctuary. If for local reasons the service cannot be held on the day named, another date may be selected. The several Churches will be permitted to report the amounts given as "special gifts," under the rule which governs offerings so designated.